

Summary

The Renaissance of Leadership

Annual Conference, 19 September 2008, Amsterdam

Do you feel optimistic or pessimistic? That is the question Twan van de Kerkhof, chairman of the day, asked the participants in the Annual Conference just before lunch. Following a presentation by Jim Garrison who created a burning platform for the need for a Leadership Renaissance in order to save human civilization.

Though I'm an optimist by nature, I voted for pessimistic. The metaphor that came up was the story of the two frogs. One was thrown in a pan of boiling water, he felt the heat, jumped out and survived. The second frog was thrown in the cold water, gradually the water got warmer and this was actually very comfortable for the frog. By the time the water had reached boiling temperature, it was too late. The poor frog couldn't jump out anymore and he died.

I asked myself how do I prevent becoming the second frog? How do you make sure you are really aware of the challenges that global heating, economic crisis and a new economic and power order present? How can I influence governments of large corporations to collaborate and make the right decisions that transcend individual interests of even incompetence?

These felt like daunting questions, hence my (temporary) mood of pessimism.

Fortunately Jim Garrison also showed some light at the end of the tunnel: a growing group of people with different values, who create their own institutions (NGOs) and who are increasingly successful in influencing decisions on a global scale. This group is referred to as Culture Creatives. I asked myself (yes more questions!) am I a culture creative? Meanwhile I found a website that gave the answer. On <http://www.culturalcreatives.org/> you can actually do a little test. According to that test I am!

These Cultural Creatives, about a third of the adult population in industrial countries, stand for new value propositions. They care about the world and at the same time about their personal development. They move from values driven by institutions like religion or politics to more spiritual and individual values. Key in Jim's message was the need for urgency and decisive leadership behavior.

I asked Jim Garrison how do you know if you are having an impact, how do you know if your own small efforts have an impact? His answer was "you don't". To illustrate, he used the wonderful story of Rosa Parks. The black lady in the US who in 1955 decided she had enough of the discrimination. She refused to make give her seat in the bus to a white passenger. She wasn't born a hero. For years she had given up her seat. Her act on December 1st 1955 was the trigger for a series of events leading to a change in the law. No way could she have foreseen the impact of her act.

The second speaker was Jeremy Black, professor of History at the university of Exeter. He focused on the present and future. He identified two major developments in leadership. First is the pool of leaders has never been as large as today. This is mainly due to changes in society across the world. In many countries women can now take leadership roles. In addition better access to education has allowed previously disadvantaged people to enter the leadership ranks. Second development is around acceptance of leadership. With an increase in egalitarian societies the power of leaders just based on titles is disappearing. Traditional leadership structures no longer work. Flexibility and adaptation to cultures and (new) values are required to allow effectiveness of leadership.

I guess the afternoon speaker, Francine Houben, tries to make an impact on our world in her way, through her approach in designing buildings and connecting spaces. She is not an architect who tries to leave her mark on a city, but she wants to create beauty and give people a place they really love to come to.

I left the conference as an optimist. I want to be a Rosa Parks. I believe we need a Leadership Renaissance and I believe I have a role to play.

September 2008, Marjon Oosterhout